

## Series: Bible math

### #153

As I was completing my *Gospel of John* series back in 1993, I mentioned the curious number "153 fish" found in John 21:11. An article in *Science Digest* (1985) had drawn attention to the fact that 153 is a special number in mathematics. To begin with,  $153 = 1 + 2 + 3 + 4 + 5 + 6 + 7 + 8 + 9 + 10 + 11 + 12 + 13 + 14 + 15 + 16 + 17$ . In other words, it is equal to the sum of all the integers from 1 to 17. This makes 153 what the Pythagoreans (math-loving Greeks 500 yrs. before John wrote) called a *triangular number*--a number that can be shown by a triangle of dots with an equal number of dots on each side (in this case, 17 dots). The first triangular number is 3: two dots below a single dot. Add a row of 3 dots below the 2 dots and you have 6, the second triangular number. The triangle of 17 is 153. (The triangle of 36 is 666.)

But there was more, I said.  $153 = 1 + (1 \times 2) + (1 \times 2 \times 3) + (1 \times 2 \times 3 \times 4) = (1 \times 2 \times 3 \times 4 \times 5)$ , or as your high school math teacher wants you to write it:  $153 = 1! + 2! + 3! + 4! + 5!$

There's still more. Take the 1 and 5 and 3, and cube them.  $1^3 + 3^3 + 5^3 = 153$ . There's even more to the magic of 153, but we'll stop there.

Still, I wondered if there was nothing more than just "a lot of fish" in John 21:11, until recently I came across "The 153 Fish and the Unity of the Fourth Gospel," by the brilliant Richard Bauckham, in *The Testimony of the Beloved Disciple: Narrative, History, and Theology in the Gospel of John*, 2007. Now I'm sure, so get ready . . .

If all these numbers make your head swim and you find yourself wondering "what difference does this make?" be patient: there's a moral to this story!

The Bible cares about numbers.

\* Genesis and the number \_\_\_\_\_

The gospel of John cares about numbers.

\* John and the perfect number \_\_\_\_\_

1:1-18 prologue: Christ's perfect mission (496 syllables)

ch. 21 epilogue: Church's perfect mission (496 words)

Who am I?

One of the \_\_\_\_\_ fish in the Church's net. *Are you?*

What is our mission?

Bring in the \_\_\_\_\_. *Have you accepted your mission?*  
John 20:30-31     *signs* (17 times in John)  
                              *believe + Christ + life* (153 times)

What is our future?

New world, new temple, fresh water!  
Ezekiel 47:1, 10     *Gedi = 17, Eglaim = 153*